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SPIRITUAL WELLNESS AS AN ISSUE IN NAVY EDUCATION AND
TRAINING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Spiritual Wellness as an Issue in Navy Education and Training:

A Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review was conducted as part of a development research project for a poster presentation on Religion and Health for the NAS Whiting Field Health Fair in May 1996. This presentation was prepared by the NAS Whiting Field chaplains. In conducting this literature search it was noticed that most of the wellness articles reviewed from military publications did not contain any references to spirituality or spiritual wellness. The purpose of this literature review is to assist military wellness researchers expand their definition of wellness to include research on spirituality and spiritual wellness.

Three limitations to this review of literature must be stated. First, this is not a complete review of literature of regarding spiritual wellness. Second, because NAS Whiting Field is a training command this review concentrates on spiritual wellness as it relates to the education and training of adults. Third, the bibliography is not limited to the research contained in the review, but contains

references to spirituality, spiritual wellness, adult education, and program development and evaluation.

Research Methodology

A review of related literature was conducted in the area of spiritual wellness as it relates to the education and training of Navy personnel. A computer search was conducted through the library of Troy State University and the University of West Florida using the descriptors of adult life styles, wellness, wellness education, wellness spirituality, and wellness program development and evaluation. A review of pertinent literature from military research was conducted at the Navy Regional Medical Center in Pensacola, FL. Further, the Navy Chaplain School in Newport, RI, and the Chaplain Resource Board in Norfolk, VA, were contacted requesting information on these topics.

Wellness as an Issue in Adult Education

Wellness is an issue in adult education and development. Physical aging, general health, psychological changes (including reactions to life events and transitions) and various sociological and cultural factors affect an adult's ability to learn and to self-actualize (Merriam and Caffarella 1991, pp. 96-110; Wonder and

Donovan 1984, pp. 260-261). Koole (1993, p. 101) and Wonder and Donovan (1984, p. 261) believe that stress prevents students of any age from learning due to an inability to concentrate. Goldberg, Carlson, and Page-Dobson (1994, p. 17) believe that many people in the military could improve their abilities if their physical and psychological health were more in balance.

While health and psychological factors do affect the adult's ability to learn and develop, they are not the determining factors in adult learning.

Suter (1986, p. 286) believes that many of the health factors which negatively affect learning and self-actualization can be prevented or delayed through programs that assist adults in taking charge of their lives by developing better fitness levels, psychological well being, a purpose in life. Other scholars believe that determining a spiritual path and values can promote lifelong learning and development (Pilch, 1988, p.5; Clinebell, 1993, p. 45; Naylor, Willimon, & Naylor, 1994, p. 28).

Wellness and Spirituality

Wellness is a lifestyle which attempts to integrate the body, mind, and spirit, so that an individual can maximize his or her unique potential (Clinebell, 1992, pp. 7-10; Pilch, 1988, p. 3; Ryan & Travis, 1991, p. 4). Studies by both wellness

experts and theologians have demonstrated that those individuals with a high degree of wellness tend to be ill less often and have a higher enjoyment of life (Fountain, 1990, p. 35; Hall, 1992, p. 19; Myers, 1992, p. 23; Rayan & Travis, 1991, p.5; National Wellness Institute, 1995, p.3; Duncan, 1996, p. 6). Adults who exhibit a high degree of wellness also feel that they are in control of their life (Miller-Dwan Medical Center Foundation, 1989, p. 6)

Persons with a high degree of wellness tend to exhibit six characteristics (Miller-Dwan Medical Center Foundation, 1989, pp. 4-5). The first characteristic is that they take personal responsibility for the conduct of their lives and well-being. Second, they regularly exercise within the safe limits of their physical condition. Third, they eat a balanced diet. Fourth, they practice some type of stress management. Fifth, they build and maintain positive relationships with individuals and groups. Finally, they develop a positive purpose in life and a relationship with a higher power or concept.

Spirituality is discussed within the wellness movement, but these discussions are usually not related to any specific faith tradition (Menconi, Peace, & Coleman, 1989, p. 8; Kolander & Chandler, 1990, p. 1; Golden, 1995, p. 3).

Spirituality is usually limited to those non-measurable items which are not part of the physical or mental portions of the body, mind, and spirit triangle (Golden, 1995, p. 4), or discussed as a "life situation" (Hughes, 1990, p. 18).

Reese and Minirth (1993, p. 41) understand spiritual health as being the key factor in understanding wellness. Their research indicates that when a person's spiritual life is without focus that person is prone to both physical and emotional illness (Reese and Minirth, 1994, p. 43). Further, if a person participates in wellness programs which emphasize only physical fitness, nutrition, stress reduction, etc. without addressing the spiritual aspects of life, the person is more prone to drop out of the program due to a lack of purpose in life (Reese and Minirth, 1993, p. 44).

The research by Clinebell (1992, p 14), Pilch (1988, p. 58), and Myers (1992, p. 25) supports Reese and Minirth. These researchers have found that those persons with a high degree of positive spirituality are able to begin and maintain positive lifestyles which include a high degree of physical fitness, better nutrition, less stressful lives, positive relationships, and generally more happier than those who do not have a positive spirituality.

Pilch (1988, p. 94) believes that the main component of a spiritual wellness program is helping individuals understand that they have both free choice and personal responsibility. Persons have the ability to choose the kind of life they will live and they have the responsibility to live the best life they can within their personal strengths and limitations. The mission of a spiritual wellness program mission is to assist the individual in removing those obstacles which prevent him or her from taking responsibility for her or his life. A spiritual wellness program will include include ways for the person to discover meaning and satisfaction, and to be able to understand her or his values, and develop self-esteem, in addition to learning about physical fitness, nutrition, and stress management (Pilch, 1988, p. 9). Writing as a Roman Catholic priest, Pilch believes that the church can assist individual in this quest.

Clinebell (1992, pp 10-14) and Resta (1994, p. i) believe that spiritual wellness must include helping persons understand their place in the world and their relationships with themselves, others, organizations, the environment, and God. Resta (1994, p. 8) also believes that spiritual wellness includes experiencing love, joy, suffering, death, and the experience of healing.

There is some discussion if spiritual wellness must, or should, be tied to a specific faith or religious tradition. Some scholars believe that Christianity is key to spirituality. Their understanding is that a positive and balanced lifestyle can only be achieved through a belief in Jesus as Christ and through the church (Guarino, 1989, p. 12; Menconi, Peace, and Coleman, 1989, p. 11; Hall, 1992, p. 20; Reese and Minirth, 1993, p. 137). They agree with other researchers and writers (Kolander & Chandler, 1990, p. 16; Ryan & Travis, 1991, p. 127; Golden, 1995, p. 4) that spiritual wellness must include developing a purpose in life, developing positive life style habits, and examining one's life and death. They also believe that this life examination can only be conducted from within the Christian faith. Others writers believe that spirituality is important in a balanced life and that spirituality is not limited by one specific faith or religion (Chapman, 1991, p.49; Ryan & Travis, 1991, p. 127; Clinebell, 1993, pp. 14-16; Golden, 1995, pp. 4-8)

Conclusion

There is a small, but growing, amount of research regarding spiritual wellness. This research tends to be from the religiously committed. While the researchers

come from many backgrounds, they posit that spiritual wellness includes a positive purpose in life, a relationship with God or a higher power, and attempts to develop ways to understand life's hardships.

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